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**INFILL AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STUDY
SITE COMPATIBILITY TEAM
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**SC 11
CREATE A FORMAL PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAM**

ISSUE: The general public has an interest in understanding the planning, zoning and development processes that are often very complex. Questions raised by the public at the community forums indicate a desire for information on land use, zoning, planning, site review and development policies, regulations and processes.

IDEA: Create a formal and long term public outreach program to emphasize the importance of community involvement and to assist the public in understanding land use issues and decisions. This program should utilize and improve upon existing efforts, such as the County Agencies web sites and brochures. New initiatives should also be developed. The following three new initiatives would provide greater public understanding of how the development process occurs in Fairfax County:

- Design and hold a regularly scheduled (i.e. annually or biennially) Countywide land use seminar to inform citizens about land use, zoning, planning and development policies, regulations and processes. Invite and publicize to citizens, HOA representatives, Board and Commission members, builders and businesses and other interested parties. Include practical and participatory elements in the seminar in order to increase its effectiveness.
- Create a video program for Cable Channel 16 about land use planning and development processes; and
- Publish a concise and coordinated booklet on the County's planning, zoning, site plan and building approval processes, which combines in one publication information from existing development-related agency brochures and adds other relevant information. The booklet should include items such as an explanation of the building and development process; the difference between by-right development and development proposals that require rezonings, special exceptions or special permits; a description of the zoning process; the difference between planning and zoning; environmental information (i.e. stormwater management and tree preservation); opportunities to provide public input; and notification requirements. A directory of development-related agency responsibilities and phone numbers and web sites should also be included.

It is envisioned that these three public information products will be designed to be used repeatedly as public educational and informational tools at the inception of all planning studies or efforts, community meetings, supervisor town meetings and wherever else it may be appropriate.

RESEARCH: Public information materials currently include the following:

- Brochures on various topics such as the Comprehensive Plan, the Zoning Process, and Environmental Concerns;
- Department of Planning and Zoning web site that provides the Zoning Ordinance, Zoning applications, all agency brochures, various forms, agency organizational chart, historic

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overlay districts and Architectural Review Board information, Commercial Revitalization District maps and links to other related sites;

- The Land Development System (LDSNet) on the internet provides the ability to review site plans, rezoning applications, and development plans status.
- The Department of Public Works and Environmental Services web site provides information on construction permits, site development, utilities, codes and standards, and environmental programs and information.
- Presentation boards explaining density and the difference between planning and zoning; and
- Various materials used for specific purposes and/or districts.

Other public information efforts include:

- Public notification of development proposals;
- Community task forces created for special studies and processes;
- Press releases distributed through the Public Affairs Office;
- Weekly Agenda information;
- Booths at Fairfax Fair; and
- Public information provided in person and via telephone through Planner- and Engineer-of-the Day assignments.

Other counties, such as Arlington and Prince George's currently have land use education programs. Arlington County reports that they conduct very successful Countywide sessions periodically, perhaps every other year or as needed. They are well attended (100-200) and include topics such as background of the General Plan; sector plans, zoning and planning processes; public hearing requirements; community involvement opportunities; and, neighborhood/community programs. Case studies are also used so participants can review actual development cases. The sessions involve two weekday evenings.

ANALYSIS: A public outreach program should have several related purposes: 1) to inform; 2) to educate; 3) to increase awareness of policies, plans, ordinances, processes and current issues/efforts; and, 4) to encourage public participation through greater familiarity with these topics and issues.

Land Use Seminar. One of the goals of the public outreach program is to increase and to improve public participation in the planning, zoning, site plan and subdivision plan processes. Typically, the more controversial an issue, or the greater the perceived impact on the existing community may be, the greater the amount of public participation. The purpose of this seminar will be to stimulate interest in planning and zoning outside of the controversy associated with a specific development proposal. This land use seminar should be designed to be "user-friendly" and to encourage public participation in planning, zoning and development processes. Knowledge of the system and process should serve to empower citizens to become more involved.

The seminar should be carefully designed to balance the educational and informational aspects of the seminar, with participatory exercises to reinforce the information given. Well-designed graphic presentation materials should add interest to the information. Information about other

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information opportunities, such as the web sites and published materials should also be publicized at the seminar.

The seminar should be designed as a model that can be easily replicated and adapted to similar processes or events that would benefit from the information included in the seminar. Several staff members should be trained to present the seminar so that it does not become dependent on certain individuals.

Booklet. The existing public information materials regarding the development process are quite extensive. However, through a coordinated effort among agencies involved with the development process, the effectiveness of these materials could be improved. Consolidation of these various materials would centralize the information in one place and it could be distributed more widely and efficiently. A booklet with consolidated information would be available for distribution at community meetings held or attended by various agencies, could be distributed annually to civic associations and at the Fairfax Fair booths, and sent to newcomers with the Supervisors welcome letters.

Video. The video would be used to provide a visual information experience and be periodically aired on Channel 16 as scheduling permits. Use of the public information channel is a good outlet to provide information about planning, zoning and development processes and to explain why the County's landscape is changing. In addition, the video could be used in a variety of other forums such as the land use summit, community meetings, by civic associations, by high school government classes or as a training tool for aspiring planners, civil engineers or developers.

EFFECTS: Greater public education will improve the public's awareness and understanding of land use processes and issues and increase the opportunities for community involvement.

Through increased familiarity with the processes, greater public participation should occur.

Concerted staff resources and efforts will be required to coordinate these public outreach initiatives including the development-related agencies, and the public affairs office, telecommunications and print shop for support services.

TEAM RECOMMENDATION: Implement new public outreach initiatives, including the design of a land use seminar, production of an educational video, and a coordinated comprehensive user-friendly booklet to improve the public's understanding of planning, zoning and development processes and issues, thereby increasing the effectiveness of public participation in these processes.